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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS BEIRUT 000566

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH
PARIS FOR ZEYA
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: POLITICAL PRESSURE SECURES RELEASE OF
PALESTINIAN TERROR SUSPECT

SUMMARY

1. (U) On February 16, the Lebanese army arrested a Palestinian national, Mohammad Abed al-Shmandur (aka Abu al-Abed) at a checkpoint near the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp. He was suspected of transporting ammunition in the trunk of his car. While his political affiliation is unclear, the press reported that Shmandur runs his own armed group. Other reports indicated that he is a member of a radical Sunni group that operates inside the Ain al-Hilweh camp, "Jund al-Sham," which is a splinter of the outlawed Esbat al-Ansar group. Shmandur was reportedly released on February 23, upon alleged political pressure from MP Bahia Hariri. End Summary

2. (U) On February 17, rumors spread in the Ta'meer area that Shmandur died in custody as a result of torture. Soon after, armed men took to the streets and burned tires and started firing in the air. Army checkpoints around the camp took precautionary measures and cordoned off the area. In the meantime contacts were made at the highest levels in the city of Sidon, particularly between MP Usama Saad and the various Palestinian factions to contain the anger and to prevent further escalation.

3. (SBU) Head of the Sidon municipality Abed al-Rahman Bizri told pol staff February 18 that Shmandur is believed to have a connection to MP Bahia Hariri, sister of the slain former PM Rafiq Hariri. According to Bizri, Shmandur's mission is to establish control over al-Ta'meer neighborhood, a no man's land between the Ayn al-Hilweh camp and the city of Sidon.

4. (SBU) Majed Mneimneh, the general manager of the al-Liwa daily newspaper -- which reflects traditional Sunni views of politics -- told pol staff February 23, that Shmandur was released following several contacts between Ahmad Hariri, son of MP Bahia Hariri, and the military prosecutor. Mneimneh added that this is a serious blow to Lebanese institutions, particularly the judiciary, adding "how can the GOL call for disarming militias when a Palestinian gunman is released under political pressure."

5. We will continue to follow this affair in light of the various implications that it may carry.

FELTMAN